

LSU identifies community conditions related to malnutrition deaths among older adults

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In a paper published in the May 2010 issue of the scholarly journal *Annals of Epidemiology*, two LSU researchers tackle a problem seldom acknowledged in the United States - the incidence of malnutrition-related deaths among older adults. Matthew Lee, professor of sociology and Provost Fellow in the Office of Research and Economic Development and his co-author Emily Berthelot, a doctoral candidate in sociology, argue that while malnutrition related deaths are primarily found among infants in the developing world, such cases are actually concentrated among older adults in the United States.

In "Community Covariates of Malnutrition Based Mortality Among [Older Adults](#)," Lee and Berthelot analyze data from more than 3,100 counties in the United States on older adult malnutrition mortality using data from the Centers for Disease Control and U.S. Census on the social and economic characteristics of these counties. In [statistical analyses](#), the researchers found that two constructs are related to high rates of older adult malnutrition death rates across counties: socioeconomic and physical disadvantages, and [social isolation](#).

Specifically, they found that where levels of education are low among older adults, poverty is high, rates of disability are high, there is limited access to telephones or where older adults are more likely to live alone or be widowed, the rates of death by malnutrition are significantly higher.

The authors suggest that poverty and related factors are associated with

[malnutrition](#) death rates because poverty limits resources to purchase food, causing people to buy cheaper and hence less nutritious items. Likewise, being socially isolated can be harmful because social supports can affect psychosocial well-being and foster healthier behaviors.

"The fact that 2,000 to 3,000 people a year die due to malnutrition-related causes in the U.S. beckons the need for additional research on this important threat to public health," said Lee. "Our study, being the first of its kind, will hopefully prompt other researchers to begin examining this problem more closely."

Provided by Louisiana State University

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